

**AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY:
THROUGH A MIGRATION TO GHANA, WEST AFRICA**

**WRITTEN DOCUMENT ACCOMPANYING THE CREATIVE PROJECT
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DIGITAL STORYTELLING**

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the love of my life, Wesley J. Barnard, my inspiration, my strength, and my model of excellence. Thank you for helping me stay true to the impact of the topic on American and African-American history, and for your research assistance, your editing expertise, and your loving support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: The African-American Quest for Authenticity: A Search for Identity
Through a Migration to Ghana, West Africa

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This paper describes how the African-American connection to the continent of Africa is undeniably spiritual, cultural and physical and is linked to the African-American's sense of self and authenticity. It presents the findings of a literature review of selfhood and authenticity plus a digital ethnographic study of African-Americans living in Ghana, West Africa. Particular emphasis is placed on the African experience during slavery in America and the W. E. Cross Model of Black Identity, which delineates a five-stage process in which African-Americans move from a negative White frame of reference to a positive African frame of reference. This paper examines what the current migration phenomenon of African-Americans to Ghana may mean to their positive sense of self and cultural identity. This paper is accompanied by a digital ethnography film, which identifies key themes related to perception of self, group identification, self-acceptance, self-actualization and the authentic cultural lifestyle of twenty-one African-Americans living in Ghana.

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“All human societies have social rank; however, the cultural identity overrides and is the highest order of identity.”

- Asa Hilliard, African-American Historian

Part One: Statement of Research Problem

With approximately 100 million people of African descent living worldwide in what many historians call the African Diaspora, one may wonder how these people have retained a sense of connection to the land of their ancestry? Before we can understand how these descendents of Africans retain a sense of connections to their ‘Motherland’, we need to understand several critical facts about the history of this group of people. First, the African Diaspora refers to the continents around the world in which Africans who were enslaved were scattered to during and after the Transatlantic Arab European Slave Trade. Those continents include Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, North and South America. Second, the Transatlantic Arab European Slave Trade roughly began in the 1400s and was abolished in 1870. [The 13th amendment abolishing slavery in the United States was passed by Congress on January 31, 1865 and ratified on December 6, 1865.] Even after the abolishment of slavery, Africans endured well over 400 years of discrimination, inhumane treatment, horrific abuses, and a ‘re-education’, which almost successfully eradicated or negatively influenced their sense of self and pride in being of African descent. Third, in spite of deliberate strategies by slave masters to sever the historical and cultural ties of

enslaved Africans with their Motherland, many people of African descent have, in varying degrees, retained a strong connection to Africa and African culture in a way that motivated them to migrate back to the land of their ancestors. This paper and the accompanying film was inspired by over 5,000 African-Americans who left the United States and have migrated to Ghana, West Africa. Could this migration phenomenon be a vehicle to help some African-Americans restore their authentic cultural identity --- their sense of self in honor of their ancestry? But, why did they leave America with all its conveniences to make this major move to live in what is typically depicted as a 'dark and un- or under developed' continent? My thesis is that historic cultural, social, educational, psychological and legislative experiences of Africans living in America strongly altered their sense of self and identity and this current migration to Ghana is evidence of their quest for self determination and authenticity.

Donal Carbaugh (1996) suggests that, "The question 'who' am I depends on 'where' I am, 'with whom' I am, and 'what I can ably do' there in that scene, with those people, given the material and symbolic resources that are available to the people there" (p. 24). Even the label, African-American, caused great debate among and between both Black and White people in the 1960's and 1970's before it was adopted universally by America. Why did it take so long to honor the ancestry of this group of people? When you consider other labels which have been applied to Africans and their descendents historically, i.e., *Nigga*, *Nigger*, *Negro*, *Colored*, *Black*, *Afro-American*, none provided a solid connection to their African cultural identity. Even the term, *African-American*, at

last appears to acknowledge the cultural identity of these people. Is it possible that nearly 400 years of slavery could have splintered and distorted the African mind and sense of self to the point where answers to the questions, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Where did I come from?’ are only vague notions in their minds?

Given the fact that over five thousand African-Americans have chosen to live in Ghana, one might ask: What is their motivation or what is the impetus? What influenced their decision? Could this migration be motivated by an African-American quest for an authentic social identity and true sense of self? Could the promotion of a psychological healing and cultural restoration underlie this migration phenomenon? Could other issues have caused them to abandon their American way of life to migrate to Africa?

In order to understand why this current migration to Ghana is relevant, we must first understand how their historic experiences in America over the past 500 years might be an impetus for this quest. Ethnographic researchers have concluded that the first step in understanding the human species and why they behave as they do is to describe their culture. Culture is defined as the “acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior. Whenever a people learn a culture, they are, to some extent, imprisoned without knowing it” (Spradley, 1976, p. 5 &10). One hundred forty-five years after the abolishment of slavery in America, are African-Americans still culturally imprisoned and don’t realize it? It must be recognized that today’s African-Americans are five to six generations removed from the actual experience of slavery. Is it possible that the training of enslaved Africans caused them to morph into something different from which they were naturally? Let us not forget they were trained to think

like, act like, dress like and even worship like their enslavers. To illustrate this morphing, let us use the metaphor of a plant. If a tropical plant is uprooted from the climate of Hawaii and transplanted in Indiana, survival would be problematic. The cold winters of Indiana would not be a nurturing environment to allow that plant to flourish unless that plant changes or (mutates) to survive. In order to survive season after season, year after year, this plant would have to adapt to its new environment, changing what it was originally.

Most of the diversity among the human race is a result of the group culture created and passed by on from one generation to the next. Group acquired cultural knowledge aids in forming social identity and influences how an individual functions and responds to a given set of circumstances within any given environment. This paper examines how the environment in which a person lives, with whom they live, the government they live under, and the symbols of the country of their birth strongly influences how people perceive themselves and how they function in a given society. For African-Americans who choose to embark on a quest for true authenticity, they must come to terms with how their common historical experiences have shaped who they are. The goal of this paper is to encourage African-Americans to recognize this cultural disconnect and renew their cultural frame of reference and reestablish their God-given right to live authentically as people of African descent.

Historical Framework

Although starkly depressing, the African slave trade must be examined, not to cast

African-Americans in the role of victims, but for readers to appreciate the enormous challenges confronting any African-Americans' quest for a sense of self, authenticity and freedom. The Transatlantic Slave Trade was a unique historic event, unlike any other event in recorded human history and was the major factor in shaping the African-American sense of self today. Unlike all other immigrants to America, *only* the Africans were forced, under threat of death, to assimilate into Western culture. Only Native Americans, in their forced removal and the later attempt at assimilation come close to the experiences of enslaved Africans.

In *Breaking the Curse of Willie Lynch* author, Alvin Morrow (2003), reminds us that the erasing of African culture from enslaved Africans was a planned process. "In the process of making a slave, the African was eventually stripped of any remaining background that would allow the Black masses to connect with their natural divinity, or even yet claim any kinship to being made in the image and likeness of God." (p. 24). This cultural reprogramming was crucial in teaching the Africans to forget who they were naturally and to accept the foreign culture of their slave masters. Failure to comply with this forced reprogramming was met with raw, brute force.

For enslaved Africans, the western way of life was a learned way of life to them and the forced re-education deeply embedded unnatural representations of African-Americans psychic. For example, they were forced to relinquish their native tongues, names, religions, value systems, customs, lifestyles, traditions, and then supplant them with the English tongue, names, religion, and value systems and to adopt a European or

American way of life, thinking and behavior. The concept of “identity authenticity” in the context of one’s cultural ancestral origin is “the highest order of identity.” (Hilliard, 1985). For people of African descent, identity is linked very strongly to cultural and ethnic experiences. “Traditional identity is ethnic and cultural. Some thinkers and analysts (Marimba Ani, Yosef ben-Jochannan, Stephen Biko, Amilcar Cabral, Chinweizu, John Henrik Clarke, Marin Delaney, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Mari Evans, Maulana Karenga, A.D. Nascimento, E.L. Nascimento, Nugui Wa’Thiongo) finally see what Africans have known forever – [that] ethnic and cultural identity is that which grows out of the shared struggles and the collective heritage of a people.” (Hilliard, 1985, p. xxi). This collective identity exists because traditionally Africans view themselves as ethnic families. These families may be fractured and scattered all around the known world, nevertheless are a collective of cultural families in which many of its members long to reunite, much like a big family reunion.

Del Jones (1992) author of *The Black Holocaust* writes about how the early socialization of Africans in America was a contraction between western ideology and traditional African culture. He states, “New religion, new names, new values, new ideology, new worldview delivered to us a reactionary consciousness. Indeed, a mentality that was anti-Afrikan” (p. 33). He states that the “Honor, dignity, pride, esteem, culture connection, ancestor continuity, nationalism, ideology, humanism, sexuality, parenthood, independence, creativity, religion, mental equilibrium, and control over your own fate, [was] all gone” (Jones, 1992, p. 28). When something or someone has been debased, they become disconnected

from their foundation. In the process they are detached from the very core of their being that gives them value. That is the case of the Negro slave. The very culture, norms, and values that allowed us to uplift and civilize our citizens according to our standard were removed from them. (Alvin Morrow, 2003. p. 23).

Since language is most critical to the sustaining of one's culture and identity, the language of the African was the first thing that had to be removed from them. According to Mel Watkins, the African was, "forbidden to speak in their native languages (and usually because of the diversity of their various tribal languages, unable to communicate verbally with fellow slaves anyway), slaves initially communicated with each other through physical gesture and the use of music and dance" (As cited in Black Humor From Slavery to Steppin' Fetchit, <http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF0204/Watkins/Watkins.html>). In 1933, Charles H. Wesley and Thelma D. Perry wrote about the way the American educational system also reinforced this reprogramming of the African-American identity. They state that, "the neglect of Afro-American History and distortion of the facts concerning Negroes in most history books, deprived the black child and his whole race of a heritage, and relegated him to nothingness and nobodiness." This mis-education fostered "deep-seated insecurities, intra-racial cleavages, and interracial antagonism." (As cited in <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>). In The Mis-Education of the Negro, Africans were even conditioned to despise their own language while being forced to learn the 'King's English' in a hostile environment. "In the study of language in school pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession of the Negro

which they should despise rather than directed to study the background of this language as a broken-down African tongue --- in short to understand their own linguistic history, which is certainly more important to them than the study of French Phonetics or Historical Spanish Grammar” (Carter G. Woodson. 1990, p. 19). Even today, serious study of ancient African civilizations is limited to Egypt and the pyramids in K-12 with a limited number of African Studies courses at the college level offered as electives. Community events planned to celebrate Black History Month typically begins with the historic injustices of slavery and moves forward from there as if Africans born in America had no previous history.

These Africans and their descendents had to function within a governmental structure grounded in a value system that was not only foreign, but abnormally hostile to them. Clark, in [his] monumental piece (1972), argues that slavery, more than any other single event, shaped the mentality of the present African-American (p. 3). Slave Codes and Jim Crow laws were on the books of the US government preventing people of African origin from exercising any rights as human beings in America. Slave Codes were laws passed in the South to prevent slaves from gaining any advantage over the dominant white community. The most common of these laws was one making it illegal for slaves to learn to read and write. Other laws prevented slaves from moving freely from place to place without a permit and from meeting in religious services without the presence of a white man to monitor their activities. Jim Crow laws were passed in the post-Reconstruction era in the South to prevent black people from gaining political power and to keep them separated from white society (As cited by Allen, 2000, in

<http://www.trans-video.net/~rwillisa/Glossary.htm>). Although slavery was ‘legally’ ended in excess of 100 years ago, 400 years of the brutality and the unnaturalness of slavery imposed a severe psychological and social shock in the minds of African-Americans. This shock was so destructive to natural life processes that the current generation of African-Americans still carries the scars of these experiences in their social, emotional and mental lives.

In spite of the extremely difficult conditions, many African-Americans tried to preserve as much of their cultural identity as they could. From the early days of the slave trade, Africans managed to retain some of their cultural identity in creative and resourceful ways. It is well documented that Africans engaged in activities such as African drumming and dance, oral storytelling and many other social acts such as “call and response” that enabled them to retain some connection to their African ancestry. This need to express their cultural identity is still noticeable today through the language, music, clothing, and modes of artistic and cultural expression of urban African-Americans. For example, most of us are familiar with urban slang, jazz, be-bop, swing, R&B, Black gospel, colorful African accented clothing and jewelry, arts and even the film and stage presences that are distinctly African. In her article *Keepin’ it Real: Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture, and Black Identity*, Andreana Clay states that hip-hop provides the world with “vivid illustrations of Black lived experience creating bonds of Black identity across the globe. Hip-hop authenticates a Black identity, and in doing so, creates a unifying uplifting force among Africans as Pan-Africanism sets out to achieve” (2003, 1346-1358). Some African-American *griots* created their own cultural celebrations such

as Juneteenth and Kwanzaa. Griot is a West African term used to describe a storyteller, or one who perpetuates the oral traditions and history of a village or family. Juneteenth became an independence day celebration in protest of July 4th because the July 4th Independence Day was not an independence day for people of African descent. In the 1960s, Kwanzaa emerged in the Black community to celebrate the African values of unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, creativity and faith.

Duality of Experiences

For centuries, African-Americans had to adapt and function in two worlds a white world and a black world. This meant they had to develop a kind of dual personality. In the African-American community, this dual consciousness was considered normal and was even referred to as being ‘bicultural’ or having the ability to safely and comfortably negotiate between two very different cultures. W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) puts it this way, “By the fact of being black, one had to maintain a "double consciousness"—looking at oneself first through the eyes of white society” (As cited in <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>). Spradley also proposed a term that also sheds light on how African-Americans had to understand, interpret and negotiate between two cultures. He termed this ability as a form of “translation competence”. This is the ability to translate the meanings of one culture into a form that is appropriate to another culture is often mislabeled. African-Americans were deemed ‘intellectually inferior’ ‘culturally deprived’ ‘learning disabled’, or in some way mentally

deficient. If one subscribes to Western mental health terms, this double consciousness has been cast in a negative light or as a type of disorder. More research needs to be conducted on the Western practice of psychology and psychiatric diagnosis to determine if some of these diagnoses like learning disabilities, educational mentally handicapped, emotionally disturbed are unfairly placed on African-American boys.

“The fact that Black students constitute 38% of the student population in classes for educable mentally retarded pupils demonstrates this ([Serwatka, et al. 1986](#)). In contrast, when placement is based on measures that are not known to be discriminatory, the percentage of Black students enrolled in classes is more closely commensurate with the percentage of Black students enrolled in the overall public school population ([Serwatka, et al. 1986](#)). We know that these tests have figured prominently in the destruction of self-concept and denial of certain educational opportunities ([Hale, 1986](#)). If one understands that the young black male is a target for destruction, then one might reasonably be suspicious of the present use of PL-94-142, which has supported the fact that 84% of all Blacks in special education are male ([Grant, 1992](#)).” (As cited in <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/peterz1.html>).

Remember the analogy of the tropical plant? Can a fish swim out of water? Forget not that Africans were ripped from their culture and forced under duress to conform to American values, customs and socialization.

For the African-American, freedom to be who they were authentically was not only unacceptable it was unsafe in America. They had to develop into a chameleon of sorts, because after all, “self-preservation is the first law of nature”. This cultural lesson of self-preservation continues to be very much a part of the African-American culture today as it was during widespread lynchings and violence throughout the Civil Rights Movement. African-American youth are still cautioned about how to act when they must interact with police officers in order to avoid being arrested or getting into an altercation with them. This could not be clearer when you recall the recent arrest of Professor Henry Gates in his own home. It is still necessary for African-Americans to project a ‘safe’ public disposition to enter and compete in mainstream American society for employment, decent housing, and quality education. How could a people maintain their sense of self and authenticity if they must function daily under these conditions?

Black Identity Model: Levels of Consciousness

In the attempt to be accepted and negotiate the two worlds, many African-Americans appear to be at varying levels of their awareness of whom they are culturally speaking. At best, an African-American sense of self, especially one connected to Africa was often *hidden* because of the negative images, perceptions and connotations that were associated with being black and African. Worst, this seemingly loss of identity seems complete as many African-Americans reject any association with Africa and are proud to declare that they are American first, last and always. They now primarily identify with the Western lifestyle or have experienced some degree of success by assimilating with

the dominant culture. Asa G. Hilliard, III (1985) puts it this way, “Many of us have forgotten, and some have never known, what it means to be free - mentally, culturally, and spiritually - from hegemonic systems. We have not thought much about our identity or we have thought about it in peculiar and superficial ways.” (xx. & xxi). Many African-Americans appear to have successfully been reprogrammed and have become completely disconnected from an African cultural frame of reference.

W. E. Cross (1971), an African-American social scientist, submitted during the Civil Rights Movement what is considered one of the most influential models for examining Black identity. In that many African-Americans are at varying stages on a continuum in their understanding of and acceptance of their Africanness, Cross’ model clearly links the African-American sense of self to his level of assimilation into American culture, the loss of identification with their ancestral heritage, and either a positive or negative sense of self in the context of living in the dominant society. His model delineates a five-stage process in which Blacks move from a negative White frame of reference to a positive Black frame of reference. These stages are: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. Refer to Table A. for a breakdown of these stages.

In spite of the appearance of freedom and choice in America, many African-Americans today appear to be more aligned to Cross’s *pre-encounter* stage and consider themselves as Americans even in the face of America’s racially discriminatory practices. The pre-encounter stage can be observed when one African-American suggests to another the thought of moving back to or even visiting Africa. The idea is quickly rejected

outright and followed by the declaration, “I am an American and I’m not interested in going back to Africa.” Thus, for these African-Americans, their social identity and authentic sense of heritage has been lost, disconnected. Many are unaware of their loss. Asa Hilliard puts it this way, “We are unconscious, unorganized, unfocused, and lost from our purpose. We do not know who we are, cannot explain how we got here, and have no sense of our destiny beyond mere survival.” (Hilliard, 1985, p. 3) Some African-Americans in the *encounter stage* may have been vaguely uncomfortable living in America, but could not explain why. Others may exist in *immersion-emersion stage* and try through trial and error, research and study to make some sense out of their experience and who they are. Others may exercise their right by seeking a reconnection to their Motherland and are pursuing it by joining a voluntary migration to Africa, as is the case of recent migration to Ghana. These people may be functioning somewhere between the *internalization* and the *internalization-commitment stage* and adopt a Pan-African ideology for self-fulfillment. Pan-African ideology refers to the belief persons of African descent have regarding their global African connection. It involves a process of becoming aware, recognizing and appreciating Africa’s contribution as the ‘cradle of civilization’ or developing the beginnings of mankind’s civilizations on earth. At the internalization/internalization-commitment stage, this knowledge stirs within people the desire to not only visit the continent in order to experience its traditions, culture, land and people, but have exercised their right to live their permanently. Forced socialization produced a people who bore little resemblance to the social identity and cultural value systems of their ancestors.

Table A.

W. E. Cross Model of Black Identity

Stages	Characterized By	As Evidenced By
Pre-encounter	African-Americans who consciously or unconsciously devalue their own Blackness and concurrently highly value White values and ways. There is a strong desire to assimilate and acculturate into White society.	Blacks at this stage evidence self-hate, low self-esteem, and poor mental health.
Encounter	The individual encounters a profound crisis or event that challenges his or her previous mode of thinking and behaving.	The Black person begins to reinterpret the world, resulting in a shift in worldviews.
Immersion-emersion	The Black person withdraws from the dominant culture and becomes immersed in African-American culture.	Black pride begins to develop, but internalization of positive attitudes toward one's own Blackness is minimal.
Emersion	Feelings of guilt and anger begin to dissipate.	An increasing sense of pride.
Internalization	Inner security as conflicts between the old and new identities are resolved	Global anti-White feelings subside, as the person becomes more flexible, more tolerant, and more bicultural/multicultural.
Internalization-commitment	Speaks to the commitment that such individuals have toward social change, social justice, and civil rights.	Expressed not only in words, but also in actions that reflect the essence of their lives.

Note: Cross later made changes in his model and collapsed the fourth and fifth stages into one, internalization (Cited in Sue & Sue, 2008, p. 237-238).

Quest for Authenticity and Reconnecting with Africa

In the modern day quest for self-fulfillment and self-realization, many African-Americans feel a calling to search for their true selves. Anton's *Selfhood and Authenticity* (2001) attests that "many people feel called to do this, feel they ought to do this and feel their lives would be somehow wasted or unfulfilled if they didn't do it." (p. 17). Many African-Americans feel this "thing," this mystical longing, or searching for an authentic connection to the land of their ancestors - Africa. This longing or calling is a quest common to all people – the quest to live according to their own sense of freedom, independence, and the desire to be self-determining. One of the earliest documented examples of some African-Americans' effort to reconnect with their cultural heritage was in the 1800's when formerly enslaved Africans immigrated to Liberia. During this same time, descendents of Africans from other Diaspora countries also immigrated to Sierra Leone with the same goals of independence and self-determination. Ex-slaves from America, the Caribbean, and Britain repatriated to Liberia and Sierra Leone during the late 18th century to the mid 19th century over a 28-year period.

As for those African-Americans who remained in the United States, they engaged in thirteen major migrations within this country in a search for more freedom, acceptance, and a safe place to remake their worlds. The thirteen migrations are: Transatlantic Slave Trade (1450a-1867), Runaway Journeys (1630s-1865), The Domestic Slave Trade

(1760s-1865), Colonialization & Emigration (1783-1910s), Haitian Immigration: 18th & 19th Centuries (1791-1809), The Western Migration (1840s-1890), The Northern Migration (1840s-1890), The Great Migration (1916-1930), The Second Great Migration (1940-1970), Caribbean Immigration (1900-present), Return South Migration (1970-present), Haitian Immigration: 20th Century (1970-present), African Immigration (1970-present) (As cited in <http://www.inmotionaame.org/migrations/index.cfm>). Descendents of African undertook these migrations in search of better opportunities and a more nurturing environment without fear of retribution. Under more favorable circumstances, many African-Americans exercised great care to negotiate between the two worlds safely and comfortably. Many chose to learn more about Africa's history on their own because American schools typically started with slavery. Other African-Americans have pioneered journeys to Africa in an effort to reconnect with the land, the culture and the people. Many other African-Americans not only longed to visit Africa, but also yearned to return permanently to their Motherland, Africa. There is a sense that in Africa they could become restored *physically, psychologically* and *culturally* as authentically whole people.

So how does an African-American '*get on board*' this modern day quest for authenticity and reconnection to Africa? Well today, African-Americans no longer need an 'underground railroad' to migrate to a safer area. They no longer need to sing 'codes' in their Negro spirituals to flee a plantation and a slave master. They are no longer forbidden to read or write or to speak to one another in their unique broken English dialect. They no longer need to 'steal away' to freedom or be forced by hate groups to

flee the country. Yes, African-Americans have more choices -- choices unmotivated by fear or hatred. They need only to Google key words such as Africa, Ghana, the African country of their choice and view videos, read blogs, visit websites that can give them tons of information that can help them navigate or discover Africa anew. Today, the largest number of African-American repatriates (over 5,000) is living in Ghana. This research and creative project aims to provide only a glimpse of why did these African-Americans chose Ghana of all other African countries.

Why Ghana?

This current voluntary migration to Ghana, although relatively young, has the potential for significant meaning for African-Americans. The early Kingdom of Ghana was one of the most powerful African empires for several hundred years. At that time, it was far more developed than even many European countries. During the Transatlantic Slave Trade, sixty-six trading posts were built along the Gold Coast of West Africa. Thirty-two of these slave forts or dungeons were built in Ghana. There is considerable debate and variation regarding the dates, the number of Africans who were enslaved, those who died in transition, those who died during the Middle Passage and those that died after arrival to the new lands, and characteristics of the slave trade between the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe. Estimates of 25 million upwards of 100 million Africans were kidnapped, sold into slavery and scattered throughout the Diaspora from the slave forts along the Gold Coast. The first Europeans arrived on the coast of Ghana in the 1400s. Early colonizers were the Portuguese, Dutch, Danes, Swedes, Britain and

the French. Initially, they were attracted by the gold, ivory and timber. Within a short period of time, human life became the main trade commodity. Because almost half of these forts were built in Ghana, it is likely that a significant percentage of African-American ancestors were taken across the Atlantic from Ghana.

Ghana, under its current borders, has only existed for approximately 100 years and was previously called the Gold Coast. In 1957 Ghana became the first of the colonies in sub-Saharan Africa to gain its independence from their European colonizers with US educated, Kwame Nkrumah, becoming the first African President in 1960.

Ghana is also the birthplace of Pan-Africanism. “Marcus Garvey inspired pan-Africanism, a movement founded around the 1900s to secure equal rights, self-government, independence, and unity for African peoples. Pan-Africanism gives honor to the multitude of gifts Africa has given to the rest of the world. It proudly acknowledges that Africa is the “dark continent”, but only in terms of the color of the native peoples who live there. The whole of Africa has an extensive and glorious scientific and intellectual history filled with advanced civilizations, which were predominantly unknown by most African-Americans until recently.” (As cited by Ian Campbell, In the Political Dictionary, <http://www.answers.com/topic/pan-africanism>). Could these facts explain the spiritual draw Ghana seems to have for so many African Americans today? This study is significant because it poses the question that if more African-Americans knew of their glorious African history, would more embark upon their own quest to reconnect with their ancestral birthright and heritage?

Accompanying Documentary of Repatriates

The accompanying documentary fulfills the Creative Project requirement for my Masters of Arts in Digital Storytelling. The goal was to interview, over a three-week period, twenty-four African-Americans currently living in Ghana. I was able to videotape interviews twenty-one people in two Ghanaian cities i.e. Accra and Cape Coast. As I videotaped their stories, I listened for the motivations, experiences and hopes of my informants. Two additional persons agreed to interviews, however could not be videotaped. Themes were noted as they described their level of African or Black consciousness before they migrated to Ghana and after residing there for a period of time. One major theme echoed by many of the African-Americans was that they referred to themselves as repatriates instead of expatriates. Their position is that since their ancestors never relinquished their rights to being an African and as descendents, they are children of the land. I can confidently attest that my goal to capture and understand how these African-Americans interpreted their living in an African country, Ghana specifically, validated their sense of self, belonging, self-worth and acceptance was successfully accomplished.

The ethnographic film includes the following:

1. A brief overview of an individual's search for self and authenticity.
2. A brief overview of forced migration linked to Africa.
3. A brief history of Ghana.

4. Number of African-Americans to Ghana and source.
5. First person narratives on the part of repatriates as to the significance of this journey in their lives.
6. First person narratives that describe what motivates them to stay in Ghana.
7. First person narratives about how their sense of self is affirmed by living in Ghana.
8. First person reports on whether their Ghanaian existence supports their living more authentically as a descendent of an African.
9. Footage of Ghanaian life, culture, landmarks, amenities.
10. A closing invitation to embark on a personal quest social identity and authenticity.

Basic Research Questions

The cultural informant will respond to the following questions:

RQ 1: What motivated you to migrate from America to Ghana?

RQ 2: How did you prepare for this migration experience emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and logistically? What technologies did you access to acquire information about Africa and Ghana?

RQ 3: What have you learned about the country of Ghana and its people that has surprised you?

RQ 4: What have you learned about the country of Ghana and its people that disappointed you?

RQ 5: Tell me about what you like about Ghana and your experience here?

RQ 6: Tell me about what you dislike about Ghana and your experience here?

RQ 7: What keeps you in Ghana? How long do you plan to stay?

RQ 8: How has your perception of yourself changed as a result of living in Ghana?

RQ 9: What would you want other Americans, African-Americans in particular, to know about their choice to migrate to Ghana?

Part Two: Literature Review

My literature review focuses on the importance of understanding how social structures assist in one's quest for identity and authenticity. I examined books that present behavioral and cognitive motivations related to the authentic presentation of the self and the importance of a cultural association. This literature review assisted me in matching an African-American frame of reference within the context of identity consciousness and socio-cultural trains of thought.

Extant literature on selfhood, social living environments, and the African-American experience support my theory that the African-American quest for authenticity is driven by a psycho-social and cultural need to reconnect to the country of their ancestry.

Although many compelling and highly scholarly books have been written that convey the trauma and legacy of the African experience in North America, this paper and film

explores the desire of African-Americans to be self-determined, self-fulfilled and self-actualized through a reconnection to Ghana.

Social Living Environments and the Self

Goffman (1959) proposed the study of the sociological perspective of social life as organized by regions within the physical environment. He suggested a contextual framework that can be applied to any social setting as a dramatic performance of the individual sense of self. He makes the case that a person is an individual in the context of the stage on which he performs. The stage is contextual and allows the individual to take on the persona that serves him at that time. The stage allows the individual to present himself as a character interacting with other characters on the stage. He suggests the stage or setting provides the guides and controls the activities of those on the stage. His model presents the concepts of real, make-believe, obvious inadequacies, and some well-rehearsed roles. I found his work to be relevant to my research in that African-Americans had to perform on a stage in America in many ways. In their quest for authenticity, even in spite of decades of discrimination, they were able to assume a persona, which helped them to enter the sports, entertainment, arts, business, and education, even in government stages to present themselves as whole and valuable people in American culture.

Donal Carbaugh explores how different social living scenes or environments and the communications that occurs within them can reveal how individuals formulate different versions of themselves. He makes a strong case for the need to understand issues of identity and how they contribute to insights into the communicative process by which they arise. Carbaugh describes how actual scenes of sociocultural life create social

identities in American contemporary social life (e.g., work, leisure, marriage and family, television and community). His study is relevant to my research because initially enslaved Africans' communicative freedoms were controlled and restricted on the slave ships, on the plantations, and in the communities in which they lived. Upon their learning to adapt to those restrictions, they once again discovered ways to transmit their culture orally, thus passing down the customs, beliefs and traditions as best they could. He concludes his thesis by proposing a way of integrating social and cultural levels of identification in communication studies to sustain valued American communication strategies, which are not always complimentary to African-American socio-cultural experiences.

Authenticity within the context of the Community and Relationships

Anton presents the idea that the modern day search for self and authenticity involves a “quest for self-fulfillment, self-realization, or personal development”. He references Charles Taylor’s *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991) frequently in his thesis. His mode of authenticity opts for self-fulfillment without regard to (a) the demands of our ties with each other, or (b) any kind of existence emanating from something more than our self-centered desires or aspirations are self-defeating and thus not authentic. Anton advocates that self-centered, egotistic modes of operating are individualistic and sees fulfillment just of the self, as neglecting or delegitimizing the influence outside of us that molds our personality. He argues that the quest for authenticity must have a “self-referential” orientation within the context of the community and relationships. His

position is relevant to my study in that traditional African-Americans' identity is ethnic and cultural and grows out of the shared struggles of the community.

Personal Identity as a Personal Narrative

Alexander addresses his view of personal identity by examining both the analytic and phenomenological tradition in the re-identification of the self. He presents how the analytic and phenomenological approaches are different and attempts to weld together insights from both. He addresses the "problem" of personal identity by examining the possibility that a person is ascribed identity on the basis of having a 'supervenient self'. The philosophy of supervenience is grounded in being dependency on a set of physical and psychological properties of a human being. He makes the case that the person is not a static entity, but reflects a temporal nature trying to find the soul, spatio-temporal consciousness. He offers that the quest for understanding the personal identity could be examined in terms of 'patterns', 'character', or 'narrative identity' that are the outcome of a person's decisions and actions. Although I agree with his position that a person reflects a temporal nature in its attempt to find his or her soul, I disagree with his position that the personal identity is ascribed identity on the basis of patterns, character, or personal narrative. Yes, we can play out patterns of behavior, reflect a certain character and assume personal narratives as we choose. However, typical ascribed characteristics are properties of an individual over which they have little, if any, control in race, ethnicity, gender, height, and etc. Ascribed characteristics of race, sexual orientation, gender, etc. result in some form of maltreatment, the outcomes of a person's decisions

and actions often opens his argument up for debates on whether personal identity decisions are based on nature versus nurture.

Gornick examines the ever-changing idea of self as demonstrated by an enduring truth-speaker found in the raw essence of a person's life. She speaks of this raw essence as being shaped by experience, transformed by events and drawn out by the wisdom of the "I". Although she suggests that the "I" is an unreliable narrator, she insists that the speaker is speaking his or her own truth. This narrative is relevant to the African-American quest for authenticity because generally Africans are a highly spiritual and reflective people. They had to rely on his raw essence of spirit to survive being kidnapped, sold into slavery, the middle passage, slavery, and widespread racism.

African-American Historical Perspective

Del Jones (1992) provides a cutting account of how African people are the victims of a genocide that began with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World. Although his depiction is highly inflammatory, it presents a strong emotional account for the African experience in America. This account was crucial to understanding how deep the violence and hostile environment reached into the African-American psyche and sense of self.

Carter G. Woodson (1990) helps us understand that African peoples have been truly mis-educated. He describes an educational experience that was largely developed based on a Eurocentric or White middle class elitist educational frame of reference. This by a large degree does not serve the needs of communities of color. He presents a

convincing case that this mis-education created a serious identity crisis on the part of African youth and it causes many Black "educated" middle class people to spend more time trying to reach the consumer driven American dream rather than working toward a real self-determination agenda of African peoples. Thus it's of little surprise today that most African students do not know much of their own cultural history or legacy. Woodson's book is clearly not out-dated. In fact, it reads as if it were published last year, instead of 1933. One of Woodson's classic quotes:

"If you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a person feel that he/she is inferior, you do not have to compel him/her to accept an inferior status, he/she will seek for it. If you make a person think he/she is a justly outcast, you do not have to order that person to the back door, that person will go without being told, and if there is no back door, the very nature of that person will demand one."

Dr. Woodson's assessments are just as on target today as they were 400 years ago and this way of thinking is critical to the African-American's sense of identity.

Dr. Asa Hilliard (2000) spoke to awakening the African through education, liberation and advancement in his book, *SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind*. He links the mind and spirit with culture and education. He makes a compelling case that one must provide an education, not just schooling's with the goal being to understand and

live up to African cultural principles, values and virtues. His work is significant to this study because it is grounded in a renewal of African values by reclaiming an historical memory of the values, customs and beliefs, which sustained African people for thousands of years.

Conclusion

As I began studying this quest for authenticity for this paper, I could not negate the importance of the group experiences and social identity of African-Americans in this country. I believe my choice to review literature on selfhood, authenticity, social environments, community and relations, personal narrative and one's race/ethnic group experience provides a balanced perspective. Erving Goffman, Donal Carbaugh, Cory Anton, and Ronald Alexander, and Vivian Gornick provide a backdrop on selfhood, authenticity, identity, and personal narratives. Del Jones, Carter G. Woodson, and Asa G. Hilliard, III provided a historical perspective on the African-American search for identity which is unique to their experience and one which empowers and restores the African right to be self-determining.

One area that could benefit from continued research and conversation is how a group's collective experience impacts their sense of self, freedom and understanding their authentic ethnic self. A study using the Cross levels of Black awareness might shed new light on the African-American consciousness and sense of who they are ethnically. Another areas that could benefit from additional study could be how Western psychological definitions and spiritual practices for 'normal' are simply different from,

not necessarily better, than traditional ‘normal’ African psychological definitions and spiritual values. Cultural norms are typically grounded in group ideas, experiences and values. I believe it is time to have the conversation about how one group’s values; ideas and experiences are not necessarily ‘better’ than the others’.

Part Three: Methodology

A. Digital Ethnography Study

Ethnographic procedures were used to interview African-Americans living in Ghana. An atmosphere was created so that the interview candidates would tell the story of their own experience. A digital ethnographer uses the camera to capture meaning from the informant’s own viewpoint and cultural experience. Informants share their insights, explain implications, and define complex social formations and issues. An informant is a native member of the culture being observed. In ethnographic interviews, the informant is asked questions to get them to describe their experience, explain events, clarify their behavior, and customs of their culture.

I chose to use digital ethnography in fulfillment of my creative project research component for the following reasons:

1. To gain experience in conducting ethnographic interviews.
2. To gain experience interacting with and collecting data from key informants.
3. To determine if the findings which result will build a documentary that reports the reality of informants

4. To videotape interviews of twenty-four African-Americans living in Ghana over a three-week period.

Pre-Interview Procedures:

Contact was made with two women living in the cities of Accra and Cape Coast to serve as our liaisons. The person in charge of the Welcome Committee of the African-American Association of Ghana was our initial contact in Accra. The owner/operator of One Africa in Cape Coast served as our liaison there. Tasks such as housing, ground transportation, interview venue, and guidance on locations to capture b-roll were requested. These persons were also charged with identifying potential interview candidates in their area. A document to inform interview candidates (aka, cultural informants) was created and sent to all of the contacts our liaison identified in Accra and Cape Coast two weeks before arriving in Ghana. This document (in the Appendix) provided an overview of the project, my objectives, explained the release and distribution of the resulting film and what kinds of questions they could expect during the interviews. It also provided some helpful tips to ensure they had a comfortable and good experience being filmed. This document was also sent to the people I had met on the Expat.com and Blackexpat.com blogs who had also agreed to be interviewed. Upon arrival in Ghana, the liaisons were contacted and names and phone numbers of interview candidates were provided. Accra appointments were scheduled and held at the W.E.B. DuBois Center.

Interview Procedures:

Each interview began with informants being thanked for participating in the project, explained the goal of the project, about the process, the purpose of the interviews, the product that will result from the interviews, and the distribution of the film.

Candidates were provided a copy of this information for their records. Basic information was collected and entered on a Field Data Sheet to be referenced later. Permission forms were reviewed and signed by each candidate before the cameras were turned on. Most interviews lasted between forty minutes to one hour. Each tape was labeled and recorded on the log sheet and time recorded. This same information was recorded on the Field Data Sheet.

Candidates were provided refreshments of cold water, juice, and cookies during each interview in Accra. Some informants were provided with taxi fare, a lunch or posters from America per the request of the informant. All were promised a copy of the film after completion. Notes were recorded and shared between the Interviewer and the Producer during each interview when a statement was made that required further clarification.

Post Interview Procedures:

Both the Producer and the Production Manager/Narrator kept journals of afterthoughts and impressions of the process, the environment, and the interview informants. Notes were compared regularly to ensure details and themes were adequately understood.

Part Four: Results

Demographics:

A total of twenty-one African-Americans were interviewed. Nine men and twelve women ranging in age from 22–79 have lived in Ghana from less than 2 months to 27 years. Two women went there after marrying a Ghanaian, four people went to Ghana because of school/study abroad/research, seven went to be free of the American culture, five went there on a quest to repatriate because of the ancestral ties, nine for health and/or spiritual reasons, eight went there for work and/or business opportunities. Two people went for tourism reasons and decide to stay. Two husband/wife teams were interviewed and one mother/daughter pair.

Findings:

1. Ninety percent of those interviewed expressed a physical and spiritual need to connect with Africa whether they went there as a student, for business opportunities, as a result of marrying a Ghanaian, the desire to get out of America or on their personal quest for authenticity.
2. Several African-Americans described being out of their “element or comfort zone” living in America.
3. They talked about feeling “free” or experiencing a “sense of freedom” living in an African country.
4. They expressed feeling less stressed and a general sense of health and well-being living in Ghana.

5. Although they all used technology (cell phones and the Internet), it was not a major factor in their decision to migrate to Ghana. Instead, they talked about knowing someone, traveling to Ghana with a group or a part of a school program prior to going.

Table B. highlights the analysis of this study. The findings reveal key themes and patterns that demonstrate the motivations that drove the African-American repatriates to reconnect with their African ancestry in a profound way. To understand this table, the following key terms explain the value systems different groups of people affiliate themselves with on their quest for self-fulfillment and authenticity. All definitions were retrieved from: <http://thefreedictionary.com> or <http://www.answers.com>.

Spiritual/Biblical Romanticism – is the belief in prophecies of the Bible.

Believers engage in an extensive and critical interpretation of an authoritative text such as the Bible or other Holy Scriptures and relate today's experiences of global politics, natural and man-made disasters, and experiences of the nation of Israel, the anticipation of the Messiah and a Messianic Kingdom and the ultimate destiny of humankind.

Ethnic Sentimentalism – The common assertion that a particular ethnic group has a special 'affinity' swayed by emotion rather than reason or realism.

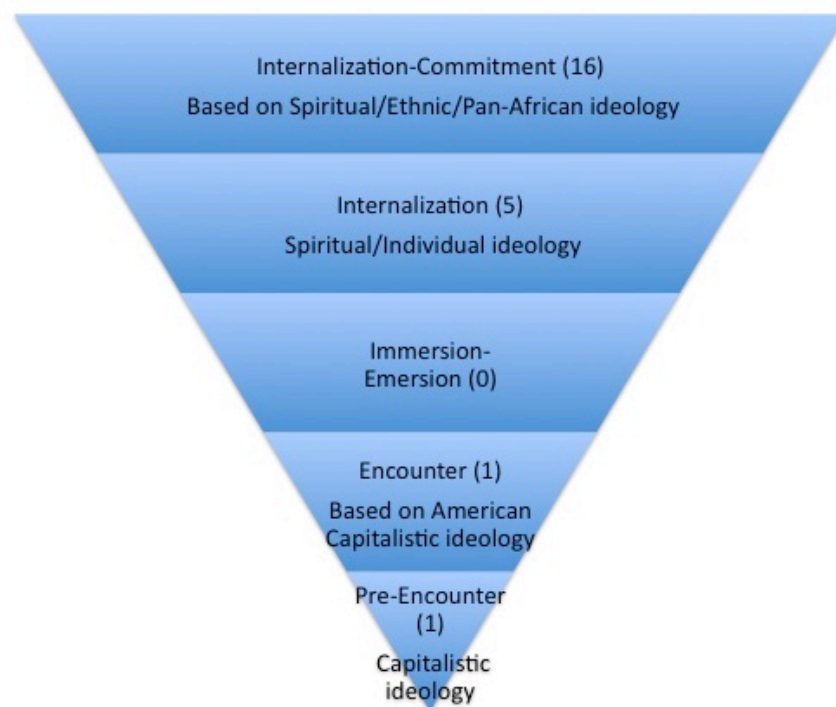
Pan Africanism - It is a sociopolitical worldview, as well as a movement, which seeks to unify and uplift both native Africans and those of the African Diaspora, as part of a "global African community".

American Capitalism - denotes belief in an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.

African-American Levels of Consciousness i.e. pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment are described on p. 13.

Table B. Sphere of Reality

African-Americans in Ghana Levels of Consciousness
Based on W. E. Cross Model of Black Identity



Part Five: Major Conclusion

As predicted, my cultural informants migrated to Ghana for different reasons. When I cross-reference the spheres of reality with the levels of consciousness, a clear pattern emerges. Those who migrated to Ghana for spiritual, ethnic or Pan-African reasons appear to be much more conscious of who they are and how they fit in the world. Those who expressed migrating to Africa primarily for business, research, or curiosity were not as comfortable with themselves or as one of my informant put it were not “comfortable in their own skin” as those on a larger spiritual connectedness path. Although those who fit more under the “individual” may have voiced some degree of spiritual consciousness, they talked about their experience being more motivated by individualistic or capitalistic values. They seemed to be in place where they are still wavering or still on the search to “discovering” the spiritual impact living in Ghana has in their lives. As a whole, eighty percent clearly spoke of their experience living in Ghana as a deeply spiritual one.

Generally, interview candidates remain in Ghana because they feel connected to the spirit of their ancestors. They expressed a sense of peace and freedom to be themselves and freedom from racial differences and discrimination. They expressed how they are able to slow down to enjoy living and no longer feeling the pressure to be caught up in the “rat race” of the US. They do not worry about nor are they distracted by the “glitter” of US commercialism and capitalism.

Limitations of the study and what I would do to overcome them

The numbers of people interviewed were not a statistical representation of the over 5,000 people living in Ghana. A goal of interviewing 10% of the total population of African-Americans living in Ghana would have been set to be a statistically serious research project. More time and probing questions could have allowed for additional depth and clarification of the responses. If this were a full research endeavor, I would observe each informant in his or her natural environment. In addition, I would have interviewed them more than once to understand their behavior, values and underlying motivations.

What I would do differently?

Given adequate funding and time, I would live in Ghana for up to one year. I would travel the countryside to identify, interview, and videotape 500 African-Americans living in Ghana. This data would be analyzed, a documentary produced and an article written to report the findings.

Did digital technology feed this African-American sense of self, authenticity and identity and migration to Ghana?

Based on the feedback provided by the interview candidates, digital technology did not appear to be a major factor in my interview candidates' quest for a sense of self, authenticity and identity before, after or during their migration to Ghana. They do utilize all current forms of technology i.e. cell phones, television, DVDs, and the Internet to stay connected to family, friends, work, and associations, which complement their need for communal living.

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APPENDIX

FIELDWORK DATA SHEET

Number_____ Corresponding to: Tape No._____

Collector:_____ Date: _____

Circumstances of interview _____

Name of informant:_____

Address:_____zip_____

Others present at interview (names and addresses)_____

Place and date of birth:_____

Family information:_____

Size of family (names and ages):_____

Ethnic heritage (mother's and father's):_____

Generation of informant:_____ (Date of informant's, parents', or grandparent immigration.) _____

Circumstances of immigration/migration:
(reasons)_____

Activities in country: _____

Migration experience and travel (U.S.A. and elsewhere): _____

Education, apprenticeship, and training
experience:_____

Occupational experience: _____

Church or religious affiliation: _____

Membership in organizations (civic, social,
etc.) _____

Special interests, skills, and hobbies: _____

Important events during life (civic and
personal): _____

Additional observations by fieldworker (Character of informant,
contact with mass media and modern world, personal opinions
and reactions that resulted from or influenced the
interview): _____

Cultural Informant Interview Briefing Information

CONTACT INFORMATION

Producer: Cindy Ball, cindyball@sbcglobal.net

Production Manager: Wes Barnard, wes98311@yahoo.com

Overview

The information provided below is meant to brief persons who have agreed to serve as a cultural informant in a documentary on the migration of African-Americans to Ghana. Videotaped interviews will be used to produce a student documentary for a Masters Degree in Digital Storytelling from Ball State University in Muncie, IN. As a cultural informant you are asked to share why you chose to live in Ghana, describe your life there, activities and events you participated in, how you navigate the countryside, and share any practices or traditions that are new to you and different from your experience living in America.

Objective

This documentary aims to reveal the reasons why to some African-Americans chose to migrate to Ghana. Was this move motivated by a quest for an authentic sense of self? What is motivated by the Pan African ideology? How did digital technology (e.g., Websites, search engines, blogs, video clips) contribute to this migration? The end product will be a 22:26 minute film highlighting several African-Americans and families living in Accra and Cape Coast.

Format

Interview segments are scheduled in 1 ½ hour blocks to allow time for the cultural informant to become comfortable with the set and production team, ample time for the interview, breaks and refreshments, and time for the production team to thank each informant for their assistance.

Interviews begin with a brief overview of the film objective and how it will be used. Although we will run a tight schedule, the production team and informants will need to be flexible. Time must be made in-between each interview so that the production crew can prepare for the next informant and of course, for the production crew to take a break, if needed.

Confidentiality & Release

Informant's confidentiality is protected by Ball State University research guidelines (IRB). The production crew will have a confidentiality statement and video ad photo release statement for the informant to sign prior to beginning the interview.

Distribution of Video

This film will be submitted to Ball State University as evidence of the student videographer's ability to produce a high quality film. The film may also be submitted to a Public Broadcast and local Cable stations to be shared with the general public. The student may also share the film with other college and university students, faculty and local social groups to encourage audiences to visit Ghana.

Structured Interviewing

The following is a list of sample of questions to be used as guides during the interview. More detailed questions will be based on the stories, descriptions and information shared by the informant. The interview style is conversational.

Types of Questions

General questions:

For Example: How long have you lived in Ghana? Where are you from? Are you a United States citizen?

Questions that allow candidates to state his or her opinions or judgments:

For Example: What do you think about the economic challenges facing America today?

Questions about the present:

For Example: What is a typical day like for you here? What kinds of cultural activities do you participate in here?

Questions reflecting on the past:

For Example: Why did you decide to live in Ghana?

Questions projecting on the future:

For Example: How are you planning to celebrate the upcoming holidays?

Suggestions for a Comfortable Interview

1. Arrive 10-15 minutes prior to your scheduled interview time.
2. **Leave children at home or with a sitter.** Because of our limited space and the sensitivity of the camera audio and video equipment, children are not permitted on the set.

3. Wear earth tone, colorful or solid color clothing. Avoid wearing **white** as this color alters the natural tone of the darker skin before the camera. Clothing with lines or stripes causes problems on film also.
4. Women and men should bring make-up especially if you have oily skin or are bald. If you don't have any, the production team will have some on-site.
5. If you have agreed to be interviewed, send the Production Manager (Wes) an email confirming your willingness to participate and confirm the time of your interview by **November 29th**.
6. If there are other matters related to your experience living in Ghana you think would be valuable to talk about, send your questions to the Producer (Cindy) by **December 1st**.

If you have questions or seek additional information, please contact Cindy Ball, cindyball@sbcglobal.net or Wes Barnard, wes98311@yahoo.com.

VIDEO LOG SHEET

Cindy Ball

Ball State University



Date: _____

cindyball@sbcglobal.net

TAPE # or NAME	EDIT START TIME	EDIT STOP TIME	DESCRIPTION OF SCENE / KEY THEME	LENGTH	COMMENTS